

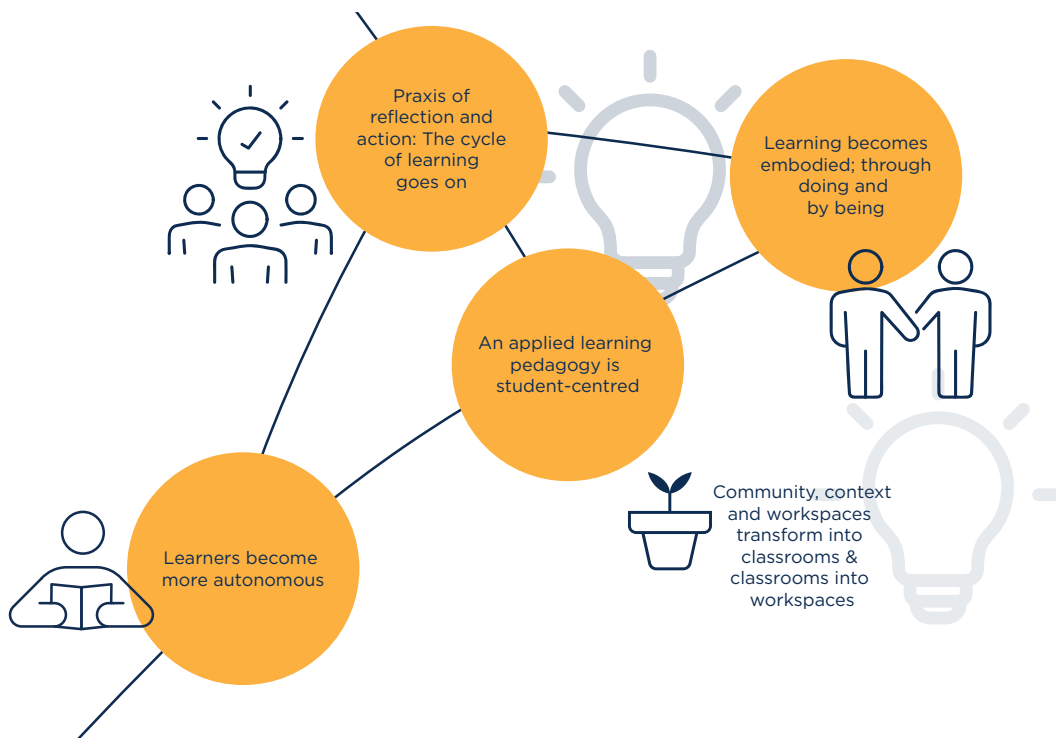


3.1. BUILDING A STUDENT-CENTRED PEDAGOGY

Strong teacher-student relationships are at the heart of applied learning. If you know something about each of your students beyond their last assessments or reports, you can guide their learning with greater insight and confidence.

Any time you can spend on building positive relationships with students is worthwhile. It supports their sense of social belonging and will likely lead to improvements in general classroom atmosphere and focus (Kincade et al 2020, Quin 2016). There will of course be some students who are reluctant to share or reflect openly, and this should never be forced.

If you teach many students and feel pressed for time, it may feel impossible to get to know all the young people who pass through your classroom, but even small actions can make a difference.



STARTING WITH STUDENTS' LIVES AND KNOWLEDGE

Teachers often start from the textbook or syllabus and then try to find real life connections with the world of work.

Instead, consider turning it around:

First steps:

Take the students' real-life contexts and the worlds of work they are familiar with as the *starting point*:

- explore their interests, future plans and what motivates them
- find out more about
 - » what they already know and do outside school
 - » the skills they have
 - » the work contexts they see and experience in the community

Practical tips to get started - finding out about your students:

- To learn about your students' interests, skills and dream careers try:
 - » Verbal pair-share exercises - students first consider a problem or question individually, then discuss it with a partner, and finally share their combined ideas with a larger group
 - » Short writing exercises – file away to refer to in meetings with students and/or parents and carers and seek more detail over time
 - » Quick surveys using a digital tool that will give you results in an easy-to-read spreadsheet for later reference
 - » Having them create an avatar that expresses their skills, interests and hopes and which they can update periodically as the year progresses
- Provide regular opportunities for students to articulate how their existing knowledge and interests connect to learning activities
- Make sure to engage with and hear from quieter students whenever possible

Large class? The above tips still apply but it will take longer to get to know all your students. You could also:

- Use parent-teacher meetings to ask and learn something of your student(s)
- Bookmark a live document (or create a page in your teacher diary) on student interests that you add to periodically over the term/year

Taking it further:

Practical tips to advance – engaging your students

- Refine learning objectives and lesson activities to reflect what you have discovered about your students.
 - » Ensure any adjustments to tasks or activities still cover the core competencies, concepts and facts you may be required to cover
- Encourage students to identify, contribute and use materials or resources that connect their interests with the topic or project
 - » Provide guidance on evaluation of quality, currency, authenticity of resources
- Invite students to suggest activities, excursions, incursions, visiting speakers or resources that they would see as valuable and relevant
 - » If there are systemic constraints that limit your ability to act on these suggestions, be clear about what is or isn't possible



SCENARIO: CONNECTING TO STUDENT KNOWLEDGE

Setting: Class 10 Geography class started a unit on water resources

Problem: The teacher wanted to move away from the textbook to make learning more locally relevant.

Solution: The teacher invited students to share their experiences of water use in their neighbourhood. For example, they spoke about borewells running dry in summer, irregular municipal supply, and tankers arriving on certain days. These everyday observations became the starting point.

The teacher framed an applied task in response:

“Let’s investigate how our neighbourhood accesses groundwater and how usage patterns affect availability.”

Students worked in groups to map local water sources. They conducted short interviews with shopkeepers, households, and the school’s maintenance staff to learn about borewell depth, tanker frequency, storage methods, and seasonal shortages.

As the investigation progressed, the teacher introduced geography concepts such as aquifers, recharge zones, water tables, and sustainable extraction. Students used these ideas to interpret what they had observed at home and out in the community.

By the end of the week, students created:

- a hand-drawn local map showing water points and usage
- a simple groundwater flow diagram
- a set of recommendations for rainwater harvesting and reduced wastage

Sharing their findings at assembly gave students a sense of purpose. The teacher observed deeper understanding, stronger analytical skills, and greater awareness of human-environment interactions, all core learning goals of her Geography subject.

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